



**THE HEREFORDSHIRE
partnership** 

**MULTI-USE FACILITIES IN
HEREFORDSHIRE:
A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT
FRAMEWORK
*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

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MARCH 2007

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

Herefordshire is one of the most sparsely populated areas in England. This sparsity means that more people have to travel further to access the services they need than the average for other rural areas, (both for the West Midlands and for England)¹. Equally public, voluntary and private sector organisations find it difficult to provide services in areas where the population base is relatively small and where people live scattered over a large geographic area – costs are higher and customers fewer, so the sums just do not add up. Many rural residents have the resources to overcome these difficulties, but for those that don't – those without private transport, on low incomes, with health or mobility problems, the young and the old – the lack of local services can seriously affect their quality of life. Fair access to services is a question of social justice, but it is also a question of sustainability. The presence of local facilities maintains the social fabric of a community, makes it less likely that the young and those of low incomes move out and reduces the need to travel.

For these reasons improving access to social, economic and public services in rural communities is identified as a key objective in national, regional and local strategic documents. Most significantly the need to improve access to services is identified as a 'key local issue' in three of the four themes of the Community Strategy for Herefordshire – Healthier Communities and Older People, Children and Young People and Safer and Stronger Communities.

Herefordshire Partnership is working with local statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations to develop a number of multi-use facilities in the County. The aim is to make it easier for people living in rural areas to access the services they need through the development of local facilities. They will be 'multi-use' because they will allow service providers to work together, extending the reach of their service by sharing resources and costs.

In recognition of the importance of improving access to services in rural areas, the Board of the Rural Regeneration Zone has agreed a 'Multi-Use Strategic Investment Framework' with capital finance available for investment over the next three years (to 2010). The Herefordshire Framework has been designed to guide that investment within the County, as well as other investment into multi-use facilities. It sets out the background and context in which multi-use facilities operate within the County, identifies opportunities for investment and makes recommendations about how to take the programme forward.

Investment in multi-use facilities could include:

- Investment into new or refurbished buildings to facilitate the delivery of more than one service from a fixed point.
- Investment to facilitate the mobile delivery of services
- Investment into ICT infrastructure to facilitate the virtual delivery of services

The framework also includes recommendations for

- The management and supporting infrastructure needed for this type of investment to make the most difference to people's lives
- Building the necessary support and partnership structures to ensure long term sustainability of the facilities

¹ Herefordshire Quarterly Economic Report November 2006

2. KEY ISSUES FOR THE FRAMEWORK

The background research, including Interviews and consultation with key stakeholders identified a number of key issues that need to be addressed as the implementation of the investment framework is taken forward.

1. Future sustainability of multi-use facilities

There is no point investing in facilities that are not going to generate enough income to be self-sustaining. There is very little or no 'new' money within the public and voluntary sector to support the delivery of services in multi-use centres. Revenue resources would have to be diverted from elsewhere, generated through efficiency savings or raised through other means (e.g. operating as a social enterprise, where income could be raised from customers).

2. The availability of matched funding for capital investment

The Framework does need to identify possible sources of funding other than the RRZ programme. The Big Lottery Fund is the most likely source of substantial capital funding, but the overall fund is small compared to the level of demand.

3. The organisational capacity within the public and voluntary sector

Effective partnership working is a pre-requisite for joint delivery of services and/or co-location. It needs the right mix of skills, resources and organisational culture. Under-estimating the transactional 'costs' or partnership working is a potential barrier to success.

4. Community capacity within the community

High levels of skill and time are needed if facilities are to be managed by members of the local community on a voluntary basis (as is the case with most Village Halls and Community Centres). Access to on-going advice and support is needed to ensure the future sustainability of any community run ventures.

5. Implementing the framework will require leadership and investment

There is much work to be done in terms of translating the priorities in the framework into tangible results. This requires commitment from all partners, clear leadership and adequate resources.

6. RRZ funding is only suitable for certain types of projects

There will be a need to assess whether projects are able to deliver any AWM (economic focussed) outputs and whether the size of the project is suitable for the detailed application process that AWM funding demands. For smaller projects other sources of funding and/or support (e.g. the NEXUS fund) may be more suitable. In addition, RRZ funding is not available to projects serving Hereford City residents.

7. Balancing need with opportunity

Since RRZ funding is only available for a limited period, a pragmatic approach is needed. Evidence of demand and need for investment will have to be balanced against the realistic assessment of whether a particular project is 'ready to go'.

3. CORE ELEMENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK

VISION

Herefordshire will extend the network of vibrant multi use hubs where communities can access services in an exciting cultural environment throughout the county

These facilities in towns, villages and small rural communities will

- Improve the access to services for rural residents
- Be sustainable in the long term
- Focus on those who find it most difficult to access the services they need
- Link into other local facilities
- Encourage people to work together, sharing these community assets

In order to achieve this vision the Investment Programme will

- **Be an actively managed programme of investment. It will identify and support the development of the network of multi use hubs in different types of communities (town, village, dispersed communities)**
- **The initial emphasis will be on innovative ‘showcase’ demonstration projects from which subsequent proposals can learn**
- **The programme will provide a co-ordinated approach to investment in non-transport solutions aimed at improving access to services and will ensure ongoing sustainability by encouraging the necessary partnership arrangements, advice and support networks**

KEY STRATEGIC CONCLUSIONS

From the evidence of the research findings, the following conclusions have guided the recommendations for the strategic approach needed to successfully deliver the Multi Use Facilities Programme:

- Strong, committed and clear strategic leadership is essential to guide the delivery of the programme
- Robust partnership working both strategically and operationally will be necessary to ensure a co-ordinated approach
- Joint services strategic planning and commissioning will be required to ensure the integration of service delivery in multi-use hubs
- ‘Showcase’ models and current good practice should be evaluated and the findings disseminated to inform further sustainable multi-use facility development
- Capacity building for both communities and public and voluntary sector service provider staff will enable focussed delivery to fit with local circumstances and existing facilities and initiatives
- Adequate resources will be required to translate priorities into tangible results

4. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The framework spells out in detail the criteria against which potential projects should be assessed and the factors that should be taken into account when deciding priorities for investment. The research for the framework included a trawl of current activity and investment opportunities. An indicative list of projects, which may be suitable for RRZ or other investment, is included as an annex to the framework. The framework also makes recommendations about how activity in relation to multi-use facilities should be managed and led. A summary of these recommendations is set out below.

RECOMMENDATIONS CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME	KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND NEXT STEPS
RRZ and other investment into multi-use facilities initially focussed on 'show case' demonstration projects in town, village, and small communities	Call to register an interest followed by initial assessment to identify showcase projects in towns, villages and remote rural areas. Embed evaluation process from the outset
Smaller scale investment through delegated funds, including investment into the private sector	Investigate NEXUS as fund of choice. Extension to the fund could be negotiated with AWM if it becomes over subscribed
Investment into supporting ICT - CAPs, wireless technology, video conferencing facilities etc. to support trend towards virtual access to all services not dependent on a physical presence.	To be taken forward by new Strategic Access to Services and Rural Partnership
RECOMMENDATIONS SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE	KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND NEXT STEPS
Develop strategic leadership and partnership structures	Herefordshire Partnership to consider and re-configure structures establishing new Strategic Access to Services and Rural Partnership
Manage the programme through a clear decision-making process	Community Regeneration Team to co-ordinate but dedicated staff and additional resources will be needed
Information management – Mapping services and delivery points	Incorporate into programme revenue budget and Year 1 work programme
Building community capacity including support for social enterprises	Continuum of support needed from community planning and consultation, developing proposals, building capacity for social entrepreneurship over the longer term
Support for services in extending reach and Brokerage Service	Needs proactive approach to responding to community requests for outreach services
Building the network and embedding learning	Create 'family' of multi-use hubs. Establish evaluation and dissemination mechanisms Bring together existing projects (e.g. INFO) with proposed projects Make sharing learning part of grant conditions